lab notes on

POWER IN ACADEMIA

ACADEMICS TAKING ACTION

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WELCOME.

WHAT IS THIS?

This is an invitation to a conversation. Similar conversations have been happening in hushed tones in university hallways for decades. We* hope, and see evidence in the news and on social media, that this conversation is ready to be turned up to full volume.

For us, the conversation began with anecdotes of sexual harassment and abuses of power in the lab. It quickly expanded to observations of the inherent but often overlooked power imbalance in scientific training. Eventually this conversation flowered into substantive changes that we hope are leading to a healthier, happier, more supportive scientific community.

This is a documentation of our story, experiences, and progress. We hope it can open up a space for thoughts, discussions, and perhaps even new practices among scientists or departments that are interested in this conversation. Please take our ideas and our lessons learned, and run with them.

* WHO ARE WE?

We are a group of graduate students (in Biology and Anthropology) at an R01 research university. We come from departments that are similar to departments all over the country. After a high profile article was published about sexual misconduct by a professor who had just left our school, we organically formed a group. Our group started meeting to discuss what it meant, and how to act on a moment when our department seemed interested in engaging in this conversation.

In this huge, beautiful collaborative endeavor that is academic research, our goal is for everyone to feel welcome and to feel valued.

* * *

THANK YOU LETTER TO AMY HARMON

Dear Amy,

I was recently a graduate student at [redacted]. I used to be in [redacted]'s lab, whose sexual misconduct allegations you wrote about for the NY Times in February of 2016. Even though [redacted]'s sudden publicity put a strain on the careers of every member of our lab, in all three universities where he was mentoring students, I wanted to let you know how incredibly grateful I am for you and your work.

I've noticed that there are two cultures that can exist around an abusive PI. The first culture is a permissive one, where whispering graduate students exchange stories about confusing "gray area" infractions, and generally steer clear of the PI because that's the only thing they have the power to do. Most other professors don't know about their colleague's reputation, and those who do feel no responsibility to get involved. In the second culture, members of the community take a direct look at the issue, and want to talk about it and try to figure it out. The day your article came out, the [redacted] department swung immediately out of the first culture into the second one. It was so refreshing to see how many people were willing to put down their pipettes and grant applications to talk about our community and how we might be failing to make it safe for everyone. During conversations on the day your article came out, I realized immediately that I had been thinking about these issues for a long time, had a lot of actionable ideas, and had never felt like there was space to talk about them. The only reason all the work we've done in the past two years has been possible is because your article brought this issue out of the unprofessional category of "gossip" and into full light.

We are all so relieved to be able to do the work we've described in this zine, and we thank you for prying open the space that has allowed us to do it.

Sincerely,
Sophie (& ATA)

* * *

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PROLOGUE

The New York Times

[redacted] Professor Resigns Amid [redacted] Sexual Miscon[redacted]

By AMY HARMON FEB. 2, 2016

A prominent molecular biologist at the [redacted] has resigned after a university recommendation that he be fired for violating the school's sexual misconduct policy. His resignation comes amid calls for universities to be more transparent about sexual harassment in their science departments, where women account for only one-

Kriti Sharma

to Biology Graduate Students

Dear Biograds,

I wanted to share with you a letter that I sent this morning to [redacted] and [redacted]. [redacted] offered to meet with me, but I would like to meet with her only as part of a group of grad students, and only after meeting with grad students. Would anyone be interested in meeting to talk this over, and brainstorm ideas about how to move forward?

administrators in our department

...

Original Message:

explanation of censorship on page 7.

> Dear [redacted] and [redacted],
>
> I imagine you have seen this article in the New York Times about [redacted]'s resignation from [redacted].
>
> Like you, and like many in our department, I am interested in ending sexual violence in our workplace and our field, particularly violence perpetrated by senior scientists against their juniors. The media spotlight that [redacted]'s case puts on our department gives us an opportunity to reflect, and to put in place strong, clear, written, public policies that will help prevent the hiring of faculty with a history of sexual misconduct, and policies that could prevent junior scientists at other institutions from being violated.
>
> I would like to suggest that we as a department -- graduate students, postdocs, staff, and faculty -- meet to discuss this case and this issue. [redacted]'s case starkly reveals the costs of silence. It is time we talked about him together, and find a way together to make our department better than he left it.
>
> Thank you for your consideration. If you are interested in going forward with such a meeting, I am happy to help organize.

Kayla Peck

to Kriti Sharma

Hi Kriti,

I'd be interested in such a meeting -- when my lab moved into GSB, I was warned by other graduate students to be "careful" around [redacted] at happy hours and such. This leads me to believe that there was broad knowledge of his behavior and no students spoke up (or if they did, nothing took place that discouraged his behavior) and no faculty took action.

...

Kriti Sharma

to Kayla Peck

Hi Kayla,

What you're saying about [redacted]'s behavior being widely known is so troubling. Many grad students in GSB know about this behavior, to the extent that the NY Times article was circulated around the [redacted] Lab with the subject heading "Oops, I did it again". But weirdly, many of the faculty are totally shocked.

...

* * *

PART I: THE PROBLEM

NO BOOGYMEN

This zine isn't about any individual villain. It isn't about sex. It isn't about "women's issues". It is about being aware of the system of power that we are a part of.

We're writing this as #metoo storms the nation. People in all fields are re-evaluating their pasts and recognizing ways in which they had not acknowledged the power they held, and may have abused it. Just as it may have been difficult for a celeb in the 90s (or even now) to realize that they were abusing their position, it can be difficult for academics to realize that we, too, have power that we need to wield responsibly.

Sexual harassment is often the lightning rod for discussions of power abuse, but the conditions that lead to sexual harassment also lead to hostility towards ethnic and religious minorities, differently abled people, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized groups. We won't solve any of these problems by Making An Example of a few bad actors and hoping everyone else gets the message. We will solve these problems by looking clearly at the system we operate in, and helping each other understand how that system is experienced by all.

There are some anecdotes in the following pages that could make our school look bad. Just as we are not interested in focusing on one person as A Boogyman, we are not interested in casting a finger at our school as The Problem. We've blacked out some identifying information, not to make it impossible to figure out identities, but to prevent readers from thinking that those identities are significant.

In fact, during the past two years our administration (particularly the biology department chair) has been truly supportive, engaging us with honesty, respect, and care. For that we are incredibly grateful.

These pages are written not to indict our community, but to support it as it grows and becomes better.

* * *

ON RAISING THE BAR (excerpt from a response to a survey about the culture in our department)

↖ description of survey on page 24

The problem I witness most routinely in the department is bullying, and other related forms of inappropriate - even childish - unprofessional conduct, directed toward subordinates. I reflect often about how much energy and determination we put into setting and excelling high standards in our scientific work, while our standards for basic collegial conduct can be surprisingly low.

(To be clear, I don't think that our department holds particularly low standards compared to other departments. I'm saying that the "normal" standards in many departments across the country are generally, in my opinion, quite low.)

As it stands, our low collective standards breed bad behavior. Here are some incidents that have happened in our department that I have either witnessed myself directly or heard about directly from a first-hand witness:

- A faculty member tells a graduate student that they will work without pay for a semester, or the faculty member will not allow them to publish a paper.
- A faculty member throws a heavy piece of equipment at a graduate student.
- A faculty member requests an administrative task from a staff member. The staff member says that it's against University policy. The faculty member threatens the staff member's job.
- A faculty member says - quite seriously - "Girls can't do math" at a lab meeting, where he is advisor to female graduate students.
- A faculty member uses a graduate student's data for a figure in a publication without listing the graduate student as an author.
- A faculty member reaches for the name tag on the breast of a graduate student, like it's a game - "Oh, I couldn't see your name." He does this to multiple female graduate students at the same event.
- A postdoc yells insults to an undergraduate researcher when the undergrad does not do a calculation correctly. The postdoc says, "This undergrad wants to go to grad school, and grad school is tough. They'll just get worse treatment in grad school anyways." (The postdoc's graduate school experience itself involved a lot of bullying.)

This last example demonstrates the intergenerational nature of the problem. The way we have been treated affects how we treat each other in the present, and can perpetuate a cycle of abuse into the future.

As far as I know, none of the aforementioned incidents were reported - even though some of them are clear instances of scientific misconduct, and some are flat-out illegal. In most of the cases, no witness intervened. And none of this list covers the much longer list of more subtle, everyday slights and plays-of-power that pass from superiors to subordinates on a daily basis - perfectly normal, just part of the air we breathe.

I will say it simply: None of the incidents mentioned above are okay. They are not okay. I have to say this simply and clearly, because I notice a worrying tendency to trivialize some of these kinds of incidents. But none of these incidents are trivial. If they are treated as such, I fear it's because we have become people who are used to everyday abuse - so familiar with it that we don't notice it anymore. That is a chilling prospect, and speaks to the need to raise our standards.

There are those who would call these incidents and many like them "gray areas". I understand why. Situations can indeed be multi-faceted and complex, and people certainly are. It is perfectly possible for us to recognize the complexity of a situation, and the multi-facetedness and humanity of a person who has done harm - and simultaneously for us to be clear that their behavior is harmful. We can understand and even maybe sympathize with the beleaguered worker who holds in the day's stresses and comes home and beats their spouse. But we are clear that there are ultimately no excuses for such behavior.

I believe much of the reason we have so many "gray areas" around colleagial conduct is not because life is so irreducibly complicated. It's largely because our standards are low. The concept of marital rape didn't exist once, and when it became discussed, it was considered by many to be a "gray area". When standards for the treatment of women began to rise, many once-gray areas resolved themselves, and clarity emerged. We don't hem and haw as much as we used to as a society about whether or not "she deserved it", or whether wives should have choices at all. We pushed for a higher general standard of conduct, and whole generations rose to meet it.

* * *

THE RULE NOT THE EXCEPTION

CONFLICT

Conflict between PIs and trainees is the rule, not the exception.
Everyone experiences some level of disagreement with their mentor during their training. PIs have an upper hand in dealing with disagreements, and have the ability to make decisions that affect trainees adversely without consequence to themselves.

The mostly unregulated working environment experienced by trainees in science is primed for exploitation, and that should make us uncomfortable.

Among the things trainees need that PIs control are: expectations of working hours; access to money, equipment, field sites, data sets, and samples; data generated in their lab; manuscript and grant submission timelines; visa applications; and through letters of recommendation, future career prospects.

That's a lot of power for one person to hold and it is often wielded with very little oversight.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is also the rule and not the exception, especially for women in academic science.

Until very recently, claiming that sexual harassment is ubiquitous in academic science was likely to be met with incredulity from male colleagues, and silent nods from female colleagues. However, many recent articles have brought to light the extent to which women in science experience some form of sexual harassment.

At the center of dealing with this crisis of abuse, is examining the power imbalances that exist within academic science and the largely unmonitored working conditions of trainees.

* * *

What has been called "diversity" is in practice assimilation. No institution that recognizes and rewards only according to a narrow set of values will ever be diverse.

My experience in science is that instead of furthering truth and knowledge, I am constantly dumbing myself down, bringing a fraction of my full self and what I actually know to the situation. It doesn't actually want the rest.

threatened
Department Director of Graudate Studies
MOVED offices (the first time)
Department Chair
Research Laboratories Director
slandered
Department Chair
Department Director of Graduate Studies
Research Laboratories Director
STALKED on campus
Research Laboratories Director
Department Chair
stalked in public
with WITNESSES
Department Chair
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND COMPLIANCE OFFICE Title IX
Reporting and Response Coordinator
Department of Public Safety DETECTIVE
Women's Center Gender Violence Service Coordinator
MOVED OFFICES (THE SECOND TIME)
Department of Public Safety Sergeant
Women's Center Gender Violence Service Coordinator
Equal Opportunity Compliance Office Title IX Investigator
title IX case OPENED
Women's Center Gender Violence Services Coordinator
Equal Opportunity Compliance Office Title IX Investigator
Women's Center Gender Violence Services Coordinator
Equal Opportunity Compliance Office Lawyer
Equal Opportunity Compliance Office Title IX Investigator
case dropped (insufficient evidence of a violation)
Women's Center Gender Violence Service Coordinator
Department Chair
Research Laboratories Director
Department CHAIR
MOVED OFFICES (third time)
STALKED ON campus
STALKED ON CAMPUS
eQUAL Opportutnity compliance office title IX reporting and Response Coordinator
Women's Center Gender Violence Services Coordinator
UNIVERSITY OMBUDSMEN
GRADUATE SCHOOL ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS
SENIOR ASSOCIATE DEAN OF STUDENTS
COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES
department director of graduate studies (the new one)
HUMAN RESOURCES assistant provost
City Ombudsmen
City Police Department
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER
STALKED ON CAMPUS
associate vice chancellor for campus Safety and risk mAnagement
county rape crisis center
victim's advocate
dean of students office director
department chair
research laboratories director
department director of graduate studies (then the new one)
department director of graduate studies (the old one)
county rape crisis center
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
stalked on campus
denied legal consultation at university legal services
Domestic Violence Resource Coordinator
City Police Department Mental Health Specialist and Victims' ADVOCATE
dEPARTMENT CHAIR (the new one)
SUFFERED
STALKED ON CAMPUS
PANIC ATTACK
stalker granted 150 student/3 TA lecture course
STALKED
what happened &
WHAT HAPPENED &
WHO
who
I
MET
met
off the top of my head
off the top of my head

I can't recall who said it or when, but I do remember hearing someone say, reassuringly, "Title IX is here for you."

Maybe it was the advocate from the Women's Center. At least, I think she truly believed it. She may have said it to me as an aside during our first meeting, which also happened to be the first time I recounted the story of my abusive relationship with my graduate advisor to a Title IX investigator. The investigator, behind the desk in the windowless room, and this advocate, next to me listened as I attempted to tell my story in some semblance of a chronological order. When I failed to do so, or when I scrambled to fill in the gaps of my memory, I could see them both wince. I was later told, by the same investigator, that if I had just told my story better or clearer, maybe I would have had a real case against the man who stalked and harassed me for two years and counting.

((While students in the Biology department were organizing and working on actions, a student in the Anthropology department who was dealing with similar issues joined our ranks. This is her story.))

That man is a tenured faculty member in the department in which I ampursuing a doctoral degree. He was my graduate advisor for less than a year when he threatened to kick me out of the program (in writing) after I expressed the desire to do interdisciplinary work- and thereby loosening his vice grip on my proposed dissertation project. I had glimpsed his ugly lust for power and control and quickly decided to switch advisors. This unhinged the man. He proceeded to stalk, slander, and harass me on campus, in public spaces, and in my workspaces (all three of them, as I moved offices each time he found me). I reported him to our department, the Graduate School, Dean of Students, Department of Public Safety, the city police, and finally, Title IX. After every report I filed, his actions escalated to be ever more frequent and threatening. I felt unwelcomed, unsafe, and unsettled everywhere I went. For two years.

So, when the advocate from the Women's Center told me- or was it the Report and Response Coordinator for the Equal Opportunity Office? Or the Title IX Compliance Coordiantor? Or was it the Associate Dean for Student Affairs? No, it had to be my department's Director of Graduate Studies, or the director of my research labs? Perhaps the sergeant from Public Safety or the university Ombudsmen?- when they reassured me that "Title IX is here for you," I wanted to believe them. I had to.

It took less than a week for the investigator and her team to dismiss my request for a formal investigation of this man's potential violations of Title IX policy. It took me twice as long to compile the evidence she asked for: emails between this man and me, emails I sent reporting this man's behavior, "in fact, any emails mentioning him at all would be great, thanks", witnesses to this man's behavior, character witnesses for me, policies I thought this man had violated*, and a detailed timeline of events, "if you don't mind..."

I offered all of this- this, a black hole that had consumed and devastated my life and nascent professional career, ravaging my work and threatening to gobble me up at any moment- I offered this(!) to the investigator on a shining platter of shame and regret and self-doubt and apathy and hope- oh the hope!- like some parasite that had convinced me I needed it to live. This was my way out. Somebody (everybody?) told me so.

When my case was dismissed, I remember the investigator cooing at me: "If there's anything else we can do for you, please don't hesitate to contact us." I could feel the hope flutter in my chest again as I asked, "What else can you do?"

"Oh, I don't know."

* * *

---

* Policies this man violated:

Title IX Harassment policy prohibits the creation of hostile and intimidating workplaces that affect the victim's participation in the program.

Title IX Stalking policy prohibits repeated, unwanted contact that creates psychological fear in the victim.

Title IX Retaliation policy prohibits direct intimidation, attempts at coersion, and harassment as a response to the reporting actions of the victim.

P A R T 2 :

A C T I O N S

> Kindness is not deference, not conflict-aversion, not niceness or politeness. It's a quality of grounded, dignified, powerful warmth. It's the acumen that allows you to see other people with exquisite precision, and to know that you love them in detail.

C O L L E C T I N G I N F O R M A T I O N

* Identifying existing resources
* Department-wide discussions
* Survey of the department
* Case study workshop

M A K I N G C H A N G E S

* Lunch matrix
* Annual check-ins
* Formal mentoring evaluation

An offer of support for fellow graduate students

Academics Taking Action

to Biology Graduate Students

Hi fellow grads,

The department recently conducted an internal survey to better understand the climate within our department, specifically in regards to sexual harassment. The results, which many of you saw on April 25, were generally encouraging. But they contained a few reports that we found worrisome.

As a student, it can be difficult to know where to go if you've experienced something inappropriate. It can be unclear which resources are actually useful, and which ones will land you in a vulnerable or career-disrupting situation.

We (ATA) are a group of students that have been working on ways to make our department safer for trainees. Because we have been working with faculty and the administration on these issues for the past year, we have learned a lot about the resources available, and we have identified and developed relationships with many of the sympathetic and concerned faculty allies. We would like to offer our support as liaisons to anyone who is struggling with a conflict in their lab or in the department. As students, we are not required to report anything, and we would only be there to help you process your situation and decide how to move forward.

Please feel free to reach out to any of us.

Sincerely,
Academics Taking Action

...

* * *

EXISTING RESOURCES: Where to go and who to talk to

I first want to say, that I do not want the following information to seem pessimistic. Yes, it is, in my opinion, abysmal how difficult it is to report and hold abusers accountable. The good news is that there are people who care about you, people who have been there, people who feel the same way you feel. You are not alone. You can get through this. You can do what is best for you.

When I first started working with ATA, I was convinced that a lot of the struggles that were brought up could be solved by spreading the word about the resources available at our school. As graduate students, it's very easy to stay in the confines of your department, and forget about the greater university as a whole. "That's obviously the issue," I thought, "let's just shed some light on this." So I set off on a mission to find resources available at the university level to address these issues.

There appear to be only two categories that the resources really fall into: talk it out/get advice, or make an official report of a policy violation, with the latter being harder and carrying repercussions. I will also say, the resources largely overlap and it is not clear to me which ones are better for which situations. I think the best place to start is where you feel the most comfortable.

Here are the resources I was able to find:

((This reporting is specific to our university, but similar roles likely exist in other universities. If you are seeking out support, please double check about confidentiality and mandatory reporting before you get too far with anyone))

Within your department:

The Graduate Student Services Manager for your program. This position exists to help you and your peers. They are likely not invested in relationships with your advisor, and they have probably heard of and seen other cases like yours. (You are not alone). They can provide confidential assistance, and a shoulder to lean on. They can talk you through some options.

Your Director of Graduate Studies. They are there for you. They should have advice. They should be discrete. Things do get a little messy sometimes in small departments... likely your PI and the DGS are longtime colleagues, maybe even collaborators and friends. Use your best judgement, but it might be a good first stop.

Members of your committee. Your committee wants you to succeed! If you feel particularly close to one of them, go talk with them. They'll have some perspective.

Your peer group. Talk to your friends in the department. Talk with them about their relationships with their advisors. It helps to see that what is happening to you is not normal. That it is not okay.

At the university level:

The Ombuds Office. This is a confidential, impartial, informal and independent resource that can help faculty, staff, and students to solve workplace problems, and to give feedback on matters of general concern. They are located off campus, so you can go to their office without being spotted. They will listen, discuss, evaluate options, mediate, coach, facilitate conversations, provide referrals to other resources. They can also contact senior officers at the University, can gather information for a situation that needs to be investigated, bring issues to the attention of those with authority to address concerns. They cannot establish, change, or set aside any University rule or policy. They may know of different, unexplored avenues within the University that could be of help as well.

Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC). This is the central office for addressing issues related to discrimination and harassment based on any protected status (including age, color, disability, gender, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status), sexual assault or sexual violence, relationship violence, stalking, and retaliation. They are not confidential, so ask questions in hypotheticals if you're not ready to report. I am so glad for this office, but it's not the panacea I originally thought it was. Not only do you need to have proof that someone is discriminating against you for your protected status (with the focus mainly on gender), a full-blown investigation has to be launched for any disciplinary measures to occur. Which... seems bad and difficult to protect yourself. Listening to one of their presentations, I was shocked at their recommendation to report after you've left the university, to safely avoid reprisals. What?! (Note, though, retaliation is also an offense... however, there is still a burden of proof on that.)

Take care of you:

Counseling and Psychological Services. It's easy to internalize a lot of the conflict you experience and that can make a bad situation worse. Your university's psychological services office often provides confidential, free counseling.

Once you know that you want things to change, that things aren't right, there are still a number of options:

Can you join a different lab/get a different advisor in the same department?

Can you leave early with or without a masters and continue your PhD elsewhere?

Those options can be hard to come to terms with, but remember, it is never worth staying in a harmful situation. If something is not working, you don't have to force it.

* * *

TRAINING FOR FACULTY

Principle inverstigators get almost no training for lots of parts of their job. No one shows them how to make a budget or hire and manage a team. No one tells them what to do if their student is in crisis, and no one tells them how to make sure they aren't unknowingly causing a student crisis.

Many PIs mentioned to us that they wish they had better training. We looked around and found many groups at our university that offer different types of mentorship training. We found over and over again that they were all interested in adapting their training to better fit the PI's specific needs. This might involve logistical changes, like offering the trainings in one longer block of time, rather than short sessions spread out over weeks. This might also involve changing the topics that are covered in the trainings. We were repeatedly reminded that the professional development people who design these courses want to be useful, and so if the trainings are not currently useful, they are happy to modify them with our feedback.

WHERE TO FIND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Our school, like many universities, has a center for teaching excellence. They offer trainings, and are happy to tailor them to faculty members' needs. The Graduate School also leads training programs for students, that can easily be tailored for a faculty group. We found an incredible diversity officer in a neighboring department who had designed a powerful workshop series, and she was more than willing to extend the invitation to members of our department. Find someone who is already doing this well (or interested in doing it at all!) and approach them about looping in your department.

* * *

DEPARTMENT-WIDE CONVERSATIONS
about the culture in our community

We invited everyone in the department (faculty, staff, post-docs and students) to come together for a conversation about our culture. We wanted to understand the range of attitudes in our community.

We tried to keep the conversation, as much as we could, in a place of contemplating the problems, rather than immediately leaping to solutions, and so the prompt questions we settled on were: (1) Is there a problem? (2) If so, what is it? and (3) What have you noticed about it?

Here are some of the things that were said ------->

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOSTING YOUR OWN DEPARTMENT-WIDE DIALOGUES

* Invite an outside moderator to lead the discussion, so that the conversation doesn't seem loaded towards any one perspective.
* Hold the same discussion on a few different days so everyone who wants to can attend.
* Attendees will keep trying to come up with "a fix". Keep drawing them back to the prompts.
* Make sure to take good notes and compile a master list afterward. This will continue to be a useful resourse to return to.

WHAT WE HEARD FROM OUR DEPARTMENT

Is there a problem? If so, what is it?

* Many thought there was a problem, or were aware that others thought so, but were not sure how to define it.
* Part of it is a communication problem- Students knew about ethically suspect behavior in the department, and the faculty did not.
* There are different tiers of problems; criminal offenses, sexual harassment, intellectual property issues, ethical disagreements, just "being a jerk", intentional abuses vs. unintentional. These may have similar origins, but ought to be dealt with differently.

What have you noticed about it?

* Question: Why don't students feel comfortable reporting inappropriate behavior?
* The fallout for mentor-mentee conflict falls almost entirely on the student. Retaliation is a huge problem, that usually makes it not worth it to report an issue.
* From faculty: How are we supposed to know how to be good mentors? The job comes with no training. Most mentor as they were mentored, for better or for worse.
* No one (faculty or trainees) seemed to know what to do in the case of a crisis (their own or someone else's).
* Everyone is already so busy. What is the incentive for going to trainings?
* There is an almost feudal-system quality to a department. The person at the top of each lab reports to no one else (especially about their mentoring), and it is very difficult to compare experiences across labs.
* Why do faculty not get any feedback on their mentorship abilities?
* Labs are so transient. We need a system to be able to track and identify long-term trends with individuals.
* How do you define good mentoring? Ideals will be different for every pair of people.
* You have to do something really terrible to face repercussions. More needs to be done well before a situation gets so severe.
* Having the support of the department is incredibly important, once a student steps forward.

* * *

TAKING THE TEMPERATURE IN OUR DEPARTMENT

the same group that conducted the survey (pg. 24)

A working group of faculty and trainees made a survey for Biology trainees (grad students & post-docs) about the climate of our department.

What was the purpose?

After the New York Times article came out, many of us wondered whether "the problem" had left our workplace with the problematic faculty member involved in the sexual misconduct case... or if it remained in some other form. We hoped to understand to what degree abuses of power were prevalent in our department, by conducting an anonymous survey of trainees.

How did we do this?

The lead faculty member of our Faculty/Trainee Working Group used the sexual harassment survey of the Department of Defense as a basis, modifying the text as necessary to make questions applicable to research trainees.

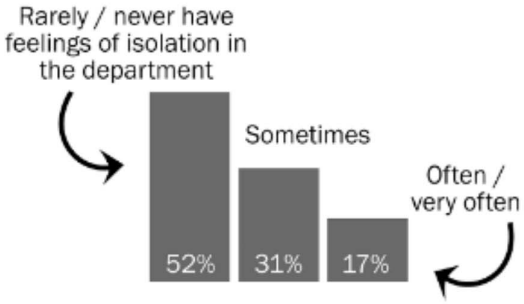
116 respondents - a 48% response rate!

What did we find?

Overall, the survey showed that trainees in our department have a positive experience. In the spirit of growth and learning, we highlighted the survey results that indicate areas for improvement. We presented these results to our department during our annual research symposium. Some examples:

Selected survey results:

Isolation



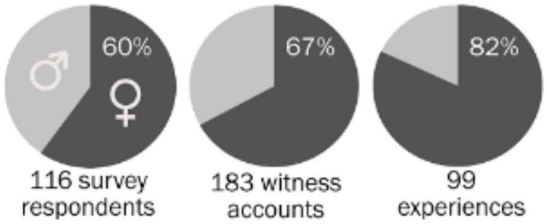
Power dynamics

13% of trainees reported their PIs are disparaging or use derogatory language.

Sexual harassment

What is the source of sexual harassment?

Of those who experienced it:
46% from peers
54% from faculty



5 accounts of trainees experiencing unwanted touching or unwanted attempts to establish a sexual relationship from faculty or peers. ***This is unacceptable.***

* * *

A CASE STUDY WORKSHOP to understand abuse of power

Workplaces (1) with strong hierarchies, (2) that are male-dominated, and (3) that are forgiving of bad behavior experience higher incidences of harassment[1]. These characteristics describe many academic departments pretty well. To reduce harassment, we need to understand how power dynamics play out in research labs.

The Faculty/Trainee Working Group hosted a workshop based off of case studies. The cases were about regular abuses of power in academia, including unwanted sexual attention, and professional bullying. The purpose of this discussion was for members across the hierarchy to hear the perspectives of people within a different level of the hierarchy than themselves: faculty listening to trainees, trainees listening to faculty.

We wanted all participants to see within themselves the potential for abuse of power. If all can agree that everyone is capable of abusing power, our workplace can move forward with more open, honest conversations about how to reduce harassment and harmful power dynamics.

[1] https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/11/organizations-sexual-harassment/546707/

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY VALUES

We followed up the case studies discussion with a brainstorming session about our department values. After all, how can we hold ourselves accountable if expectations are never clearly stated? The suggestions were compiled and edited by the Faculty/Trainee Working Group. By making these values public across the department, we hope everyone will feel empowered to challenge words and actions that don't meet our commonly agreed-upon standards.

* * *

THE LUNCH MATRIX (making connections with your colleagues)

Once you join a lab there are very few opportunities to get to know other people in the department. If you start having trouble in your lab and don't have any other strong relationships in the department, things can get way harder than they need to be.

The faculty in our department (organized by the awesome Amy Maddox) had already been doing monthly lunch meet-ups of small randomized groups, 3-4 people each. We jumped in on it and expanded it to include students, post-docs and staff.

I was a 5th year student when we started doing this, and in every lunch matrix I participated in, I met at least one colleague that I had never met before. It's not a huge department, it can just be hard to get out of one's small circle. We discuss science, or life, or careers, or art, or politics. In the short time we've been doing this, I've watched many of my awkward hallway relationships melt into outwardly friendly ones, and I hear that departmental meetings have become more comfortable and colleagial. We hope that with a stronger support network, the next time a student is trapped in a conflict, they will be able to envision more options out besides sacrificing their career.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STARTING YOUR OWN LUNCH MATRIX

This is how we do it: Anyone who wants to be involved opts in. Once a month we run an R script (github.com/tintori/lunchMatrix) that takes all the names of the people participating, and scrambles them into groups of 3 or 4. An email is sent out, and each small group arranges a time to meet up for lunch or coffee. On even months, the groups have a mix of faculty and non-faculty, and on odd months, faculty and trainees meet separately.

* * *

HOW'S IT GOING?

(yearly one-on-one check ins)

Before graduate school, I was a lab technician for a PI that I really enjoyed working with. On my last day in the lab, he told me that he had filled out an exit survey, and he was required to go over it with me. In his answers, he pointed out that I sometimes struggle on my own for a long time instead of reaching out for help. I immediately realized he was right, appreciated that he noticed a truth that was hard to me to see for myself, and wished he had told me earlier so we could have worked on it together.

Regular, open conversations about How Things Are Going, guided by specific questions about the trainee's progress and the PI's mentorship, are incredibly helpful for everyone. Without these conversations, little issues can brew into bigger ones, just because there was never an appropriate time to bring it up. The issues can be about professional practices, lab etiquette, or anything else.

We recommend making time once a year to have this conversation. We have borrowed a worksheet from the incredible Beth Shank, who meets one-on-one every year with each of her trainees.

Name		**Date**	

Please think about your performance and progress over the last year in the following areas and evaluate yourself on a scale of 1 (excellent, exceeds expectations) to 5 (poor, below expectations).

Area	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**	**N/A**
Research Creativity						
Research Independence						
Research Progress						
Research Productivity						
Time Management/Exptal Planning						
Recordkeeping						
Reading of the Literature						
Writing Ability						
Oral Presentations						
Seeking Advice when Appropriate						
Teamwork and Mentoring						
Leadership						

What do you think has been your biggest strength this past year?

What area has been your biggest weakness this past year?
How can we work together to strengthen your skills in this area?

What are your concrete research goals for the next year?
Briefly describe them here and comment on what you think you need to do to achieve these goals.

At this point in time, what are your career goals? What can you do over the next year to help position yourself for this career? What can I do to help you prepare?

Do you feel your project is clearly defined? Are you confident explaining the background, goals, and results of your project? If not, how can we improve this?

Are you getting enough guidance for daily, experimental tasks?

Are you comfortable learning new approaches/techniques in the lab?

Do you feel you are given enough independence in directing your own work? Why or why not?

What would be your preferred way of coordinating talking with me about you research? (Scheduled/regular/informal/sporadic/etc.)

What do you think I have been doing well with regards to your mentoring? With regards to managing the lab?

What do you think I have been doing poorly with regards to your mentoring? With managing the lab?
How could I do to improve on these aspects?

Do you feel the group is a good scientific and intellectual community? What works? What could be improved?

Are you having a positive experience in the lab? If not, why not? What could we change to improve that?

Any other comments/suggestions?

I also recommend http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/ for a more complete career planning/assessment.

* * *

A FINAL SAFETY NET - formal mentoring evaluations

Superiors need to be reviewed by their subordinates. Faculty need to hear feedback from their trainees, graduate student mentors from their undergraduate trainees, and so forth. People who don't get feedback don't improve. Protecting people from feedback doesn't do them any favors. This is why we have things like peer-reviewed publications.

Mentorship cannot be treated like some optional hobby that we work on when we feel like it. Rather, it's an integral part of our responsibility as scientists, i.e. part of our job, and needs to be as open to feedback as the other important aspects of our job.

We propose that every time a PI is up for post-tenure review, their trainees are surveyed for feedback on the PIs leadership. These surveys will be read by an independent committee, who will decide if anything exceptional needs to be mentioned to the chair. In most cases there will be nothing to report.

If there is something to address we suggest that the department chair sets up a series of opportunities for the PI to reform their behavior. If more frequent follow-up reviews continue to show that they were unable to improve, they may lose their privilege to train students for some unit of time.

This exercise is meant to accomplish two things. (1) Students will get in the habit of providing feedback regularly, good or bad. If giving feedback is already part of the routine, it won't feel like a leap of faith to open your mouth. (2) Administrators will be able to identify conflicts that need outside intervention. From within a conflict it can be difficult to identify an abuse as such, let alone stand up against it. This is a safety net, so that students don't have to figure it all out themselves.

This is still a proposal- We do not have the power to move this action forward ourselves as students. It is our most ambitious project, since it is the only one that actually requires the administration to make policy changes. We hope that its importance is as obvious to others as it is to us, and that someday this, or some version of it, will be standard practice.

FOR EXAMPLE

It is important for each department to have stated standards of professional conduct. Then mentoring evaluations can be performed to make sure PIs are living up to those standards.

Here are some examples of how we might design evaluation questions, based off of a statement of values*:

Value: Commitment to rigorous experimental design, data collection, and data reporting, and to the training of the next generation of scientists in these principles.

Question: **Have you or others in the lab every felt pressured to report data that might be misleading or perform experiments that might be unethical?**

Value: Consistent respect for every member of the community regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, national origin, religion, economic status, physical, mental, or emotional ability, personal life circumstances, outside obligations, or age.

Question: **Have you ever received differential treatment that you believe you wouldn't have received if your identity in any of the above categories was different?**

Value: Recognizing and celebrating each person's unique contributions to collective success.

Question: **Do you feel that your work has been fairly attributed in publications and presentations?**

* * *

* These values are drafted by a working group led by Jean Cook for our school's larger biomedical sciences umbrella program.

PART 3:

REFLECTIONS & RESOURCES

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATING TO A HARASSER

A few summers ago I attended a course at a prestigious marine station. It began with a sexual misconduct training and ended with a colleague harassing me for weeks, going so far as to sloppily force himself on me late one night at my microscope. I thought, with frustration, about the training that had not seemed to have made the slightest impression on my harasser. We are taught to look out for bad people, and what we should do if a bad person harasses us. This is a useless way to frame the issue. Virtually all people regard themselves as good, so when we talk about harassment as something bad people do, we let everyone off the hook from considering the fact that we might do it ourselves, or may have already done it. We need to discuss sexual harassment as an understandable mistake (not excusable, but understandable), and one that every one of us is capable of at this very moment.

My harasser a few summers back didn't think of himself as a bad person and I didn't think of him that way either. He thought he was in love and I thought he was unhappy and looking for a cure. So while he repeatedly put me in an awful position, I couldn't get him to understand that what he was doing was sexual harassment.

A couple of years later, after one of my co-PIs left academia under sexual misconduct allegations, I watched a lot of "what a scumbag!" comments roll in. I know the subtext of such a comment is "My disgust statement proves that I would never do something like that." But I'm not convinced that it works that way.

I would love for us all to ditch the 'evil villain' angle, and instead think about harassers as people like us. It wouldn't prevent all abuses, but if everyone was aware that a colleague they liked (or even they themselves) could also mess up and make another feel extremely uncomfortable, it wouldn't be so hard to identify it when it happened. And a little extra self-reflection would help us all act more responsibly toward each other, lowering the baseline of how much harassment women in science have grown to expect as an occupational hazard.

* * *

TIPS & TRICKS for setting high standards, individually and collectively

The gold standard for me in discerning what is "not okay" is to ask myself, "How would I feel, think, and act if this behavior was being directed at one of my peers, or loved ones?" From there, it is easy to decide what I will and will not tolerate, and it's easy to notice and to support or intervene when bad behavior is being directed at the people around me.

Other questions I've found helpful to ask myself are, "If you saw this kind of behavior out in public, or in your own home, what would you call it?" And a particularly useful one: "How would I interpret this behavior if it were coming from someone on a different rung in the hierarchy?" This last one helps me maintain more consistent expectations across the board. I expect the same level of basic respect from my superiors as from my subordinates, and expect myself to give the same basic level of respect to both.

* * *

TIPS & TRICKS - Protect yourself, consider being co-advised

When one of my PIs left academia amid sexual misconduct allegations, everyone in our lab suffered. Several (at time-sensitive stages in their careers) were set back by the many years lost setting up and breaking down his new labs in new university after new university. Some had such a bad taste left in their mouths that they opted out of the next stage of the adademic track. The few of us (including myself) that were mostly unscathed were the ones that had a second mentor.

It is bizarre (and disturbingly medieval) that one of the most important tasks a graduate student or post-doc has is to make sure that the single person at the head of their lab still likes them by the end of 5 years. Having two thesis advisors relieved a lots of potential stresses for me - I had more ownership over my project (a custom combination of my own interests), more financial stability, a broader range of technical and intellectual support, and the comfort of not being stranded under one person's set of rules. And finally, when one of my labs imploded, I already had another home with a PI that was invested in me and my project.

If you're about to join a lab, or if someone is about to join your lab, I strongly recommend you consider a co-PI situation.

* * *

THINGS WE DIDN'T NEED

I had a lot of preconceived ideas about what we would "need" to make changes to the culture of our department and academic science. As we began to take action, I realized those ideas weren't right at all.

THINGS WE DIDN'T NEED

Permission
Money
Retribution
A pre-formed plan
Rules
Countless hours
Justification
Experience
Unanimous support

THINGS WE DID NEED

We needed a group of people who were willing to work hard on a difficult problem and who were willing to give their talent and time. We needed the courage to express the frustration and disappointment we felt with the current culture. We needed support from people at many levels, including in our administration. We needed ideas - big and small; simple and complex. We needed patience and persistence and faith that together we could make a difference.

* * *

FOUR LEVELS OF INTERVENTION

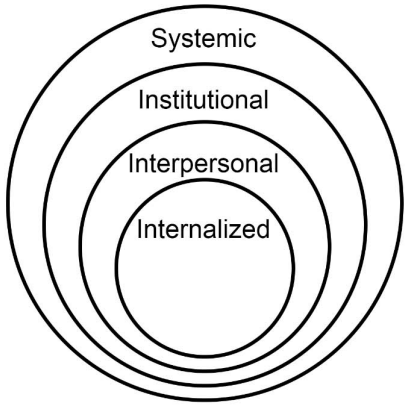
From the workshop "How to promote a healthy culture in your academic department" conducted at the 102nd annual conference of the ESA, 2017. While reading about each level of abuse, try to identify beliefs or behaviors in your own experience that fit the description.

Internalized (within ourselves): Identifying and addressing beliefs, thoughts, and feelings we have around abuse in our workplaces.
Example: "She publicly berated me because I'm lazy and stupid. (it was probably for my own good)."
Example: "Everyone else is driven and just focused on their science. Why am I letting my advisor get to me?"
Strategies for intervention: Groups to talk with one another about our experiences, support groups, counseling.

Interpersonal (between people): Identifying and addressing the ways in which people in our workplaces (including ourselves) intentionally or unintentionally act in cruel and harmful ways towards others.
Examples: Public expressions of prejudice and hate ("Girls cry too much to do science"), bullying and berating, public shaming, physical violence (throwing objects), unwanted sexual advances, financial threats (withholding pay or benefits), labor theft (lack of proper attribution).
Strategies for intervention: Mediation, legal action, workshops and trainings to empower people to identify and intervene.

Institutional: Identifying and addressing ways in which instituations (departments, universities, professional societies, funding agendies, etc.) either deliberately or indirectly cause harm or create conditions within which it's highly likely that harms and abuses will occur.
Examples: Total control of trainee funding and advancement by sole PI makes it likely that trainees will not fight back in cases of abuse; tenure review of junior faculty by senior faculty means junior faculty are unlikely to speak up when they witness abuses of power; Title IX can only intervene in cases where an abuser crosses a legal line, leaving cases of abuse that are just shy of that line unaddressed.
Strategies for intervention: Changing policy, offering creative alternatives to "business as usual", challenging and changing culture and incentives (e.g. actively rewarding those who speak out against abuses of power through praise, integrity awards, favorable professional reviews, etc.).

Systemic (between institutions): Identifying "the cumulative and compounded effects of factors that systemically privilege some and disadvantage others" (from ARC Research Center).
Examples: People who have abused power in one university are hired by others without disclosure or consequences; departments and funding agencies may reward based overwhelmingly on high-profile publication records, thereby working together to overlook abuses of power by powerful academics; bad labor conditions in one workplace bring down labor conditions in all workplaces ("Sure, things are bad in academia, but where else am I going to work? It's better then what workers have to put up with in retail.")
Strategies for intervention: Highlighting history, root causes; challenging myths and ideologies; challenging multiple institutions of addressing their intersection.



A big heart. That's what we're each born with. We are capable of so very much. We can love each other totally. And in this moment, that is the most important thing. Whatever we "win" or don't win, however the institution changes or does not change, that is not the primary concern. If we want to change the institution, it is out of love and respect for ourselves, each other, and those who come next.

* * *

Excerpts from "wishful thinking"

by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, PhD

you wake up each day
as new as anyone
there is no reason to assume
you would be supernaturally strong.
there is no reason to test your strength
through daily disrespect and neglect.
you don't need to be strong.
everyone supports you.

you do so many things
because it feels good to move.
you have nothing to prove
to anyone.

everyone respects your work
and makes sure you are safe
while doing it

you have chosen to be at a school,
at a workplace, in a community
that knows you are priceless
that would never sacrifice your spirit
that knows it needs your brilliance to be whole

we mourn any violence that
has ever been enacted against you.
we will do what it takes
to make sure that it doesn't happen again.
to anyone.

when you speak
we listen.
we are so glad that you
are here, of all places.

My friend Alexis wrote this poem when she was a grad student herself. Like most people in academia, she was a witness to normal, everyday abuses of power in her university. The full poem is 57 messages she wished she had received during her time in her program.

I'm sharing these excerpts with you because they are also my wishes for you and for all of us.

The place where science happens is a human place. To begin grad school is not only to join a lab and do science. It is also to enter a powerful hierarchy at its lowest ranks - a little like joining the Catholic Church as an acolyte.

Where large differences in power exist, abuses of power do happen, regularly and predictably.

Wherever you work, you will be part of the culture of academic biology, and your participation can and will change a culture that needs to change.

You can show up knowing that if another person has published a hundred more papers than you, or brought in millions of more dollars of funding than you, or is considered an unparalleled scientific genius by the entire establishment, none of that actually means that their rights to safety, dignity, credibility, and respect are any greater than yours.

Wherever you chose to work, I hope you will take these wholehearted good wishes with you, because you are somebody who really matters, and you wake up each day as new as anyone.

* * *

YOU YOURSELF WITH THE STEADY BROWN HANDS

A relection on what it means to not just mitigate abuses of power, or even end abuses of power, but to challenge the right to power itself and to take power.

By Kriti Sharma, February I3th, 2017

Imagine for a moment having hands on the levers of this world. Imagine not having to go through extraordinary and psychically costly effort to lovingly and very very carefully persuade him to put down the gun. Imagine, in a swift and compassionate motion, simply taking the gun, unloading the bullets, hurling the piston into the sea, harmless, a new home for clams.

Imagine not having to beg this tender, human male - tangle of ordinary need, knotted and luminous and deep - imagine not having to have diligently studied the blueprints of his inner labyrinth just to acquire a bit to eat. Years of careful scholarship, to know when you've edged too close to the closed and stubborn core, to know precisely what and how and how much you can reveal of your true person before some inner siren begins to wail in him and he is shutting down, shutting you out, and shutting the padlock on the refrigerator door.

Imagine patiently sawing open the padlock. Imagine opening the refrigerator door yourself. You - yes you, you yourself with the steady brown hands - imagine being able to open the refrigerator door, and to take what you need.

Imagine the direct path - as direct as may be possible - between here and some livable future. Imagine untwisting the line so it is a little cleaner and clearer. "Cut out the middle man," as they say. Less energy lost to detours, more power left to be a cause in the world.

Imagine taking power. Imagine being able to do it, to be able to empty the guns and fill the refrigerators, and leave them unlocked and available to sustain everyday life. Imagine yourself the hands of the bodhisattva, skillful and steady, steering by the stars of wisdom and kindness. Imagine making mistakes, and trying again, and never giving up on your own good heart, on your bravehearted people, or on the generous earth. Imagine the enslaved ending slavery mid-sea, steering the ship as liberated beings towards a livable home.

* * *

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